

# The REFORMED JOURNAL

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A Periodical of Reformed Comment and Opinion

June, 1951

## *The Christian Reformed Church IN THE AMERICAN WORLD*

By GEORGE STOB

### **On Being Ourselves**

WOULD such withdrawal mean that we commit ourselves to "a policy of extreme isolationism"?

Advocates of our NAE membership think withdrawal would mean just that. They feel that our membership in the NAE has brought us out of our historic isolationism, has put us full into the American world, and has brought us into the great modern fight against all the foes of orthodox Christianity.

As recently as May 15, 1951, it was said in *De Wachter*, (p. 311): "There must be a voice that speaks for those who belong to the orthodox persuasion. From that point of view, too, it is of great value that the NAE speaks for us. The days of our being isolated, in that sense, are past."

Well, what about that?

The last thing we want, certainly, is to merely "be by ourselves" and be without relevance to or influence upon the American world. We ought to abhor a narrow isolationism as the very plague of death to our Church.

In his gracious providence God has given us a home in America. And as our life has been fixed here, so too our calling is to this land in which we have a place.

We pray that we may fully become what in Christ's name we must be — a Church in America, a Church of America, a Church for America!

But we shall not be meaningfully or fruitfully a Church in America and for America, if we do not always strongly maintain and always strongly live and speak in terms of our distinctive Reformed character.

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That association means and has meant compromise.

Therefore that association should cease. We must withdraw from the NAE.

Our membership as a Church in the NAE (National Association of Evangelicals) is an association that means compromise.

That association has meant compromise not only without but even within.

Some evidences of this have been given in my previous article on "Our NAE Dilemma?" (Cf. *The Reformed Journal*, May 1951). There are other such evidences, and unhappily they are still appearing.

Even apart from that, an analysis of our NAE relationship makes it plain that an association, *for common witness*, of churches with different and even basically conflicting beliefs cannot mean anything other than compromise.

In becoming members of the NAE we have subscribed to the NAE "statement of faith." Let it be good enough *as far as it goes*. The fact is that it stops short of being OUR statement of faith.

It is a compromise statement — a "Common Denominator" creed. It leaves out and denudes that part of our witness of the *very things* that make us Reformed.

But, it is only thus that we could unite and remain united with NAE churches for common witness.

## THE C.R.C. IN THE AMERICAN WORLD—Continued

To be for America what God calls us to be, we must always be our Reformed selves, and speak for ourselves in terms of our Reformed witness.

### Losing Our Identity?

**B**UT it is an unhappy fact that by coming into the NAE we have given up our voice in a large and crucial area. We are letting — we are even asking — the NAE to be the “mouthpiece of our Church” and to “speak for us” to the American world.

Not only that! We have even, in a large and crucial area, yielded our identity as a Church, and have submerged ourselves in the loose structure of a Fundamentalist super-Church. And if in the American world we come to be known and spoken of as “Fundamentalists,” we ought to acknowledge that our membership in the NAE gives both reason and warrant for it. For when the American world sees and hears us speak through the NAE, *it does not see us as we ought to be or hear us as we ought to speak.*

We cannot get away from the fact that our membership in the NAE affects the very heart of our life and witness as a Church.

We belong to it as a Church. It acts for us as a Church. It speaks for us as a Church. The NAE is in fact a super-Church, which does the work of the Church *by doing the work of the churches* of which it is made up.

Strangely, we thought we were very careful about avoiding that — even while being a member Church in the NAE.

For eight years we have been declaring and protesting bravely: “The NAE may not do the work of the Church.” Meanwhile, in the same breath, we were over and again deciding, as a Church, “to continue membership in the NAE” and to charge the NAE to “speak for us” against Modernism *et al.*

That is fairly amazing. On second thought it is almost unbelievable.

We have been proclaiming: “The NAE may not do the work of the Church.” And at the same time we have, as a Church, united with other churches in an association of *churches*.

Does any one expect an association of *churches* to keep from doing the work of the Church? If so, why in the wide

world should *churches* associate? Or do they, when they associate, cease to be *churches*?

Do our delegates to the NAE suddenly cease to be *ecclesiastical* delegates, with an *ecclesiastical* mandate, for the performance of an *ecclesiastical* function, to an *ecclesiastical* end?

Obviously and decidedly not!

### NAE Does the Work of The Church

**I**T may seem doubtful to some to say that “the NAE may not do the work of the Church.”

But there is not one shred of doubt about this:

1. The NAE *does* the work of the Church!

2. The NAE *does* the work of *our Church!*

3. We send our ecclesiastical delegates to the NAE to represent us as *a Church*, and through them we commend, urge, persuade the NAE to do the work of our Church, — to act for us, to “speak for us.”

4. The NAE functions for its member churches in those matters “that require united ecclesiastical action” (Cf. *The Banner*, Ed., June 9, '44).

5. The NAE frames a confession (the NAE “statement of faith”), makes that confession binding upon its members, and through its Convention messages and otherwise administers the Word of God. Thus the NAE carries out a function which Christ has committed to *the Church* in terms of what is called the *potestas dogmatica* or *docendi* (i.e., the power to frame confessions and witness to the truth) (Cf. L. Berkhof, *Reformed Dogmatics*, Vol. II, pp. 204-206; 1932 edition).

We say: “The NAE may not do the work of the Church.” And then we proceed to delegate to the NAE a large and significant part of *the work of our Church.*

We might as well be honest with ourselves.

This is the most distressing instance of a NO-YES that has come out of the whole of our fallible denominational life.

But more distressing still is that by endeavoring through the NAE to be in and for the American world, we have gotten lost in the American world, and have become *for the American world* not a Church with a strong and un-

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compromised Reformed character, but a mere part of the NAE.

*That is not the way out of isolation!*  
*That is the way into extinction!*

### Promise of Return!

**B**UT by God's grace we will return from this fallacy.

The strong resolve to keep our identity and maintain our independence, which we have otherwise shown even in our relations with other Reformed churches, gives the promise that we will bethink ourselves and return.

We have always been very, very jealous in the matter of our relations with other Reformed churches. Notices from the history of “Church-Correspondence” in our denomination how careful we have been in defining the terms on which we shall recognize and fellowship with so-called “sister-churches” (Cf. Schaver, *The Polity of the Churches*, Vol. II, pp. 190-192).

There is no Church in the world to which we feel ourselves so closely related as the *Gereformeerde Kerken* in the Netherlands. On occasion we ask for their judgment and advice on certain doctrinal or ecclesiastical matters. When we receive it, we are always perfectly free to accept it or reject it.

It is very strange, however, that we have given to the motley of churches that make up the NAE a power we have never given to even the *Gereformeerde Kerken* — namely, the power to “speak for us,” and the power to make decisions

that become our decisions (even when our delegates raise their voices against them.)

We will return from this, however.

When we bethink ourselves, we will not continue to give the NAE a power that we would never think of giving to the *Gereformeerde Kerken* — the power to do the work of our Church.

\* \* \*

There is another instance that shows we are basically determined to maintain our identity and independence as a Church.

That is our relationship to the Reformed Ecumenical Synod.

No inter-church affiliation is so close to our hearts as the Reformed Ecumenical Synod. It came to life in Grand Rapids, and in large part through our direct agency. It is a fellowship of those who with us confess the *Reformed faith*.

We have been suspicious of that word "Synod." We tolerate it, but only with the understanding that this "Synod" is really no more than a Conference for consultation and common study.

We refuse to submit ourselves to a super-Synod; and we refuse to be drawn into a Reformed super-Church.

No decision of the Reformed Ecumenical Synod is any more than advisory. We have declared "that only such decisions will be binding for our Churches when they have been approved or adopted by our own Synod" (*Acts* 1947, p. 90; cf. *Acts of the Reformed Ecumenical Synod*, 1946, p. 36).

But we forgot ourselves and surrendered our independence when we joined the NAE.

*For the decisions of the NAE become the decisions of our Church simply by a majority or "unanimous" vote of the NAE Convention.*

We permit the NAE what we have stoutly refused to permit to the Reformed Ecumenical Synod. We permit the NAE to do the work of our Church.

Our principle — sounded forth often these last eight years — is that "the NAE may not do the work of the Church."

Our practice — over the same eight years — is in flagrant violation of our principle; *for the NAE does the work of our Church.*

But we will bethink ourselves and return from that — and return to the ecclesiastical spirit and position of our historic tradition.

## Neo-Congregationalism

**T**HE principle above referred to is not an absolute one.

In a certain sense it may be said that the NAE *may* do the work of the Church. It may do the work of the Church because it is a super-Church, made up of an association of churches. That its membership includes some schools and institutes does not make it any less a super-Church. That only makes it a stranger one.

We fool ourselves when we think the NAE is not a Church unit. It is.

The NAE is one Church organization. It is loosely constructed, to be sure. It is no Synod. But one doesn't expect a Synod of American "evangelicals." That is contrary to the ecclesiastical principle with which individualistic, congregationalistic, "evangelical" churches operate. The congregational principle of independency (characteristic of American "evangelicals") allows of no Synod as the ultimate form of Church organization. It makes allowance only for an *association* of independent churches.

\* \* \*

It is no far cry at all from the Baptist Associations (a denominational name) to the National Association of Evangelicals. The Baptist churches started out independently, and through regional and national Associations became a denomination.

It would be foolish to predict that the present National Association of Evangelicals will, within 50 or 100 years, be a new denomination in the American world. But if we take note of developments in American Church history, it does not seem wholly impossible. The NAE is now virtually, though loosely, the same kind of denomination (i.e., an Association of independent churches) as were the Congregationalists, Baptists, Disciples, and other groups in the formative period of their history.

But we shall not worry about that.

For before that process appears to be under way — and, we trust, *very long before* — the Christian Reformed Church will have separated itself from this Association of churches, and will have returned to a more consistent adherence to Reformed ecclesiastical principles.

## Approach to America

**W**E want to get out of our isolationism, without losing identity and going into extinction.

How shall we be fruitful and influential in our American world?

### The Basic Answer

**T**HE big answer — the primary answer — has already been given.

We must strictly maintain the full independence and strength of *our Reformed character* and tradition. If we sacrifice that at any point, we cannot succeed. We can only fail.

We must keep the full independence and strength of *our witness*, and not at any time compromise down to a "Common Denominator" witness.

And we must retain *our ecclesiastical identity*, and approach our world in our own name, with our own voice, and through our own distinctive agencies.

These things are basic.

For that reason, the first requirement for getting out of our isolationism and for fulfilling our calling as a Reformed Church in our world, is that we dissociate ourselves from the NAE and stand and work, by God's grace, on our own.

### A Practical Answer

**H**ow, then, shall we fulfill our calling to our world?

At this point the question becomes very practical, and needs a practical answer.

I would suggest a five-point program through which the Christian Reformed Church may play a vital role in Christian service to the American community:

1. A serious and vigorous Home Missions effort.
2. Expansion of our Back to God Radio Hour, and exploitation of its follow-up opportunities.
3. Greater production of fresh and relevant theological writings, written for our world and in the terms of our times.
4. Enlargement of Calvin Seminary, its faculty and facilities, and the offering of its theological education to American ministerial aspirants as well as to our own.
5. The founding of a Calvinistic University, and the promotion through it of Calvinistic principles in all branches of higher learning.

## THE C.R.C. IN THE AMERICAN WORLD—Continued

Perhaps this is far from complete. In the nature of the case there can be no detailed delineation of any part of this suggested program.

But if we are really serious about getting out of isolationism and into our world — this could serve as a beginning.

And though we can say but little of these matters here, the editors of this Journal hope to make provision for fuller discussion of them in later issues.

Meanwhile, it is hoped they will provoke some discussion, and better still, be something of a stimulus to some action that gets us somewhat beyond words.

### Home Missions

**T**HREE is no doubt that the first service we owe to our American world — with its eighty million unchurched — is the gospel of Jesus Christ.

There is a terrific missionary challenge right in our own country — and we have not been meeting it.

It is in the area of Home Missions that we can most effectively confront and combat the forces of "Secularism, Romanism, Communism, Liberalism" in our day.

These forces take possession of and become incarnate in people. We cannot expect to dispossess them merely by sending out great orthodox pronouncements from the housetops. We can be used of God to dispossess them only by leading more and more people to Christ, and by bringing those people into the saving, sanctifying, disciplining agency and fellowship of the Church of Christ.

We must confess that we have not done much in Home Missions. Our Home Missions have been largely a misnomer. We have for the most part spent our Home Missions effort in gathering together our "dispersed brethren of the Reformed faith," and in promoting new churches for our own church membership.

It is high time that we sense our *mission* calling in the home area, and make a serious and vigorous attempt at a real beginning.

We have been disappointed by NAE efforts at evangelization. We have even discouraged and inhibited those efforts.

The more urgency then to get on ourselves, to spearhead the Christian Reformed Church into the American world, to gather all those who are God's

from among the unchurched into our churches.

We profess to have the purest gospel preaching. Fling it out into the American world!

We profess to be a pure and vital Church. Spread it out over the American people, and gather them into it!

And let the Christian Reformed Church increasingly reflect, in America, the many nations, races, tribes, and tongues that make up the Church of Jesus Christ.

### The Back to God Hour

**T**HE most encouraging phase of our denominational witnessing effort is our Radio Hour.

Here is a ministry that has claimed national interest and exercises a national influence. It is a radio ministry with a radio message which many impartial judges rate second to none.

People of many stripes have found it to be a most effective antidote for them to the liberalism of their own churches. Religious leaders, including hundreds of ministers, have acknowledged their indebtedness to our Radio Hour, and confess to have been shaped in their own service by it.

Obviously we should expand, promote, and exploit to the limit a so effective and richly blessed denominational agency.

We can scarcely stand still or retrench. This magic outreach has pulled us into the American world more than any other activity of ours.

But we must not be content to be pulled out. We must push out. Push out into wider areas. Push out into television.

We must do more. We must follow up the radio witness by pushing our Church out into areas reached by our radio voice. And our own churches must push out their own constricting walls, and minister to and claim more of the people of their own communities.

The radio voice is our herald, preparing the way for an advancing Church with an aggressive Home Missions outreach.

Let us expand, extend our Radio Hour. And let us take our own witness seriously by exploiting the opportunities it opens for the advance of the Christian Reformed Church into the American community.

## Theological Writings

**S**EXY novels and comic books are best sellers.

It so happens that religious books are too. There is a large quantity of religious literature bought by our American people.

The liberals are tireless producers. Liberal periodicals announce new books from liberal minds nigh every week.

The Fundamentalists are not far behind. There are reams of homilies, devotional tracts, moralizing pamphlets, and books of an often superficial and unrealistic nature that come from evangelical presses.

But there is a dearth of respectable orthodox religious literature. And there is a situation in our world that calls for books to counter a theological famine and to counteract theological heresy.

We profess to be theologically minded and to come out of a vigorous theological tradition.

I have already confronted myself with the "Physician, heal thyself!" But that will not deter me from calling to my colleagues to study and think, and to turn their study and thinking into fresh and relevant religious and theological writing.

Nor will I refrain from suggesting to our people that they clamor for and demand from their ministers and teachers the kind of writing that can make our common faith and witness known in our world through the printed page.

We must write for our world, and not only for the Christian Reformed hearth. And we must remember that even the Christian Reformed hearth is much in and much conditioned by our world.

There is a language, a thought-form, an address that is appropriate to our day. We must think and write out of the eternal Word, but with fresh application of it to the life of our day, and in the terms of our times.

Dr. Carl Henry once said to one of our ministers: "You people have a theological spirit. We Americans need to be taught by you. Why don't you people write? We are waiting for you."

Why can't we, why don't we write religious books that liberals can't ignore, and by which "evangelicals" will be led and taught?

We must!

## Calvin Seminary

CALVIN Seminary was founded in 1876 for the training of Christian Reformed ministers.

Today, seventy-five years later, Calvin Seminary is still training Christian Reformed ministers, and by sufferance an occasional Baptist.

Calvin Seminary is an institution with facilities for providing a thorough theological education, and for putting into the American world thousands of men trained in a solid Reformed theology.

But we have been content merely to put back into the churches and catechisms from which they came only tens of Christian Reformed men.

We are hiding our biggest light under a bushel.

All through America there are men who want to go into the ministry with the preparation of an orthodox theological training. Some of them are disappointed students at American divinity schools. Fuller Theological Seminary is unable to accommodate all those who clamor for entrance.

Calvin Seminary could train hundreds of American men for a ministry in American churches, and thus place in strategic spots throughout our American community religious leaders shaped under the influence of a Reformed theological education.

Why do we try to combat "Secularism, Romanism, Communism, Liberalism" with a seven-point truncated statement of faith; and fail to use Calvin Seminary to train men who would penetrate to the heart of our world with a full and rich gospel and a fruitful theology?

Westminster Seminary receives all who would come. And without benefit

of NAE, Westminster Seminary has trained leaders for American churches, for the Reformed Church in Japan, for Korea. And Westminster has claimed to the Reformed faith erstwhile American Fundamentalists who have studied Kuyper and Bavinck from the Dutch and are now preaching and teaching their theology.

We should do likewise.

Let us build a greater Calvin Seminary, with more and larger class-rooms, a larger library, a dormitory or two, and invite to it American men who will go back into the American world with a Reformed theological training.

## A Calvinistic University

THIS is another possible agency through which we might bring our influence into the American world in a most strategic way.

The high importance of a Calvinistic University, as a means for promoting Calvinistic scholarship in every field of learning, and for developing the cultural implications of the Christian faith in the spirit of the Calvinistic tradition, has long been recognized.

We are still far from the achievement of it. The problems which need resolution before we can come to the realization of this ideal are large and complex.

But one thing is certain.

If we are seriously concerned to fight "Secularism, Romanism, Communism, Liberalism," a Calvinistic University would be calculated to strike at the vitals of these forces, as they move in our American world, in a way that could never be thought of the culturally irrelevant and culturally reactionary NAE.

\* \* \*

These are some of the things we

might do and must do if we are to serve the American community, and if we are to come fully to grips with the forces that imperil the Christian faith in our world and in our time.

These are things in which the genius and the strength of our heritage may come to fullest and most effective expression.

This way to service would also be the way to greater self-development in our Reformed tradition.

Those who call us to the service of our world through association with the NAE not only do us disfavor but are asking the impossible.

We cannot serve by reducing and submerging both our Reformed witness and character.

To follow the road of a compromising association in which those from whom we differ in important matters speak and act for us, is to move in the wrong direction.

That is not the way to influence but to futility.

That is not the way out of isolationism, but the way into extinction.

Shall we follow that way? God forbid!

There is another way open—and we have no right to choose any other. It is the way of vigorous, independent, thoroughgoing Reformed self-assertion and witness in our world and to our world.

Let us be rid of our inferiority complex. Let us live in the manner and to the measure of our boast. Let us thrust ourselves, with all that God has given us in our heritage, directly into the task and conflict of our world.

There is no better way for us to contribute what God has given us to the full-rounded effort in which we are united with all of those who are truly the Lord's.

# The Majority Report Examined . . . . “WORLDLY AMUSEMENTS”

by HENRY STOB

DID the Synod of 1928 put an absolute ban on dancing, movie attendance, and card playing? Did it say that to dance, to go to the movies, and to play cards is always and necessarily to sin?

These are the questions that Synod

must answer when it convenes in June.

When it comes to consider these questions—they are really a single question—Synod will be served with contradictory advice. Five members of the nine-man Committee on Clarification will advise Synod to reply in the affir-

mative; the other four will advise it to reply in the negative. Synod will have to do the one or the other; there is no middle ground. The issue is drawn, and it is sharply drawn. Decision is inescapable. Should Synod hesitate to declare itself, such hesitation would in

## "WORLDLY AMUSEMENTS" — Continued

itself be a declaration. It would be a declaration to the effect that Synod itself does not know what stand the Church has taken on amusements, and this would be a virtual rejection of the majority report. It would be a declaration to the effect that there is no plain teaching in the Resolutions on the single point in dispute, and this is what the minority contends.

### The Burden of Proof

**T**HE majority represents the Synod of 1928 as absolutely condemning any and all participation in the three amusements. Since the minority fails to find warrant for this representation, the burden of proof falls squarely upon the majority.

All the members of the Committee, both those on the majority and those on the minority side, have studied the Resolutions. They have a common understanding and appreciation of almost all matters discussed in them, including the central matter—Synod's earnest and uncompromising condemnation of worldliness. They are agreed on the meaning and intent of the decisions—except at one point: the majority believes itself to have discovered something in the Resolutions that has escaped the most careful scrutiny of the minority. What the majority has discovered, it avers, is the teaching that to go to a movie or to play cards is always, under any circumstances, by anyone, necessarily a sin. This the minority does not find in the Resolutions, either directly or indirectly. It therefore looks to the majority for evidence; it, with the Church, waits upon the majority for proof.

This proof the Report of the majority seeks to provide. As far as I can determine, five separate "proofs" are given.

### Resolution II

**A**RGENGUMENTS advanced in support of the thesis in dispute should, of course, be based upon the very text of Synod's Resolutions. Strictly speaking, no other arguments are allowable. This the majority recognizes when it declares that "by 'clarify' we understand our mandate to mean that we are . . . to determine from a close study of the text of the decisions of 1928 just what 'stand' the Church took on Worldly Amusements at that time" (Agenda, 1951, p. 24).

In accordance with this principle, the first argument of the majority is taken directly from the language of Resolution II. The majority regards this Resolution as crucial, which it no doubt is. Says the Report: "As to Resolution II, this is basic to all the rest. Here Synod defines its stand over against theater-attendance, dancing, and card playing" (p. 37). This Resolution reads as follows:

While *several* practices are found in our circles which cannot pass the muster of these principles, and while *all* our amusements, not only theater-attendance, dancing, and card playing, should be judged in the light of these principles, yet Synod feels constrained, in pursuance of the decisions of the Synod of 1926 in the matter of amusements, to call particular attention to this familiar trio. It greatly deplores the increasing prevalence among us of these forms of amusement, urgently warns our members against them, and further refers our people to the material on the subject given in the report of the Committee on Worldly Amusements.

This Resolution, says the majority, plainly and unqualifiedly condemns theater-attendance, dancing, and card playing as worldly and therefore sinful. Observe, the majority continues, that the three amusements are declared not to pass the muster of the doctrinal and ethical principles set down in Resolution I; they are declared not to pass the test of Scripture. Observe further that Synod greatly deplores the increasing prevalence of these amusements, which it could do only if it regarded them as sinful in themselves. Observe still further that Synod urgently warns against them, which it would not do if they were not always and necessarily sinful.

Now what is one to say to this? It must be acknowledged that when the majority stands on Resolution II it stands on the strongest ground available to it. If it cannot maintain its position here, it cannot maintain it anywhere. The question therefore is: Does this Resolution support the majority opinion?

### (1) Synod Warns Against

**C**ONSIDER first the warning: Synod "urgently warns our members against" the three amusements. This is taken by the majority to mean that

Synod forbids our members to engage in them. But that is certainly to put more weight upon the text than it will bear. Is it not more reasonable to take Synod at its word and to understand it quite simply as "warning" against these amusements, just as today every sensitive Christian is warning against television, and as every responsible leader is warning against strong drink? Such warnings imply indeed that there is danger, and when the warning is urgent the implication is that the danger is great, but surely "to warn against" is not the same as "to prohibit absolutely." Synod is aware of the subtle and insidious power of these amusements: it recognizes that they are able to exert upon the unwary a thoroughly evil influence; it therefore warns against them, urging all Christians to be alert and sensitive to their threat, demanding of each that they consider prayerfully what in these things the Lord requires; but it does not, when it warns against these things, thereby judge that every conceivable engagement in them is necessarily a sin.

### (2) Synod Deplores

**C**ONSIDER next the fact that Synod "greatly deplores the increasing prevalence among us of these forms of amusement." According to the majority this statement proves that Synod regarded these amusements as sinful in themselves. The following is what the majority says: "By deplored the prevalence, the increasing prevalence, of these amusements, Synod deplored their existence" (p. 33). Just as previously the phrase "warn against" was taken to mean "prohibit," so here the word "prevalence" is taken to mean "existence." Now the simple fact is that "prevalence" does not mean "existence," as any one can verify by consulting a dictionary. In the absence of a dictionary one may profitably reflect on whether existence is susceptible of degrees. Of course, it is not. One can speak of "increasing prevalence"; one cannot speak of "increasing existence." It will therefore not do to say that when Synod deplored the increasing prevalence of these amusements, it deplored their very existence, as of something *per se* sinful. What Synod deplored was precisely the "prevalence" of these amusements, that is, the widespread, frequent, indiscriminate engagement in them. It deplored this because it knew that the average modern movie, for

example, is artistically thin, morally unsound, and spiritually harmful, and therefore not the sort of thing that the Christian can in good conscience enjoy. But Synod did not declare, when it deplored their prevalence, that any engagement in any one of these amusements is invariably and necessarily sinful.

### (3) They Cannot Pass the Muster

**C**ONSIDER now the third and final statement in Resolution II that the majority appeals to in support of its thesis: "While *several* practices are found in our circles which cannot pass the muster of these principles, and while *all* our amusements, not only theater-attendance, dancing, and card playing, should be judged in the light of these principles, yet Synod feels constrained . . . to call particular attention to this familiar trio." Of this the majority says: "Did not Synod definitely say that these amusements cannot pass the muster of the principles which it adopted?" (p. 23).

What can one say to this? What requires to be said at once is that a certain plausibility attaches to the majority opinion at this point. The language of the Resolution seems at first glance to support the majority contention. But a closer study reveals that this is not the case. Observe the following points.

a. Notice, first, the predication: "Synod feels constrained to call particular attention to." It is the only predication that this long and complex sentence makes, and it is not the sort of predication that one committed to the majority position would naturally expect. Such a one would expect that Synod, after formulating two introductory and meaning-laden "while"—clauses, would come out in the end with a clear and definite pronouncement condemning and interdicting the three amusements. But this is precisely what Synod does not do. Synod "calls attention to," and nothing more.

But the majority is not deterred by this. Just as previously it had identified the phrase "warn against" with the word "prohibit," and just as previously it had taken "prevalence" to mean "existence," so now it regards "to call particular attention to" as an equivalent of "declared to be numbered amongst." That is, the majority reads Resolution II as if it said: "While several practices are found in our circles

which cannot pass the muster of these principles . . . Synod feels constrained to declare that the familiar trio are to be numbered among them."

Now the fact is that Synod does not say this, although, if this is what it intended, it could have said it very easily. Synod merely "calls attention to." But "to call attention to" is to do nothing but to bid one look at. It makes no assertion at all. The awkwardness of the expression suggests that Synod went deliberately out of its way to avoid making the kind of assertion the majority attributes to it.

b. But more than that: Which of the two relative clauses governs the sense of the predication? The fact is that the familiar trio is mentioned only under the second clause. The Resolution could have said: "While several practices, not only theater-attendance, dancing, and card playing, are found in our circles, which cannot pass the muster of these principles . . ." but this the Resolution does not say. What it says is: "while all our amusements, not only theater-attendance, dancing, and card playing, should be judged in the light of these principles . . ." This suggests that the predication "calls attention to," if indeed it is to be given the force of an assertion, means that the familiar trio is to be judged in the light of these principles. And this, of course, will be acknowledged by all.

c. Finally, let all that has just been said in *a* and *b* count for nought. Grant for the sake of argument that Synod definitely said that the three amusements cannot pass the muster of these principles. Even so it would not necessarily be taking the majority position. It would not necessarily be saying that these amusements are in every instance evil and thus absolutely and without exception contraband. It could be saying--and this is all it may reasonably be regarded as saying--that, *taken as a whole*, the modern dance, the modern movie, and the modern practice of cards stands condemned before the bar of Christian ethics. But a condemnation of something as a whole does not imply a condemnation of every part. Who would not admit that, taken as a whole, the modern radio and the newer television, to say nothing of the modern liquor traffic, fails to pass the test of Christian ethics? But are we to conclude from this that a Christian may not use a television set or drink a glass of wine?

### More on Resolution II

**R**ESOLUTION II, says the majority, teaches that engagement in the three amusements is invariably and necessarily sinful. That the language of the Resolution will not bear this interpretation we have tried to show. That the majority is mistaken in its interpretation we conceive to be further evident from the following considerations.

a. The teaching attributed by the majority to Resolution II is not anticipated in Resolution I, and is indeed precluded by it. In Resolution I Synod "reminds our people of the doctrinal and ethical principles which should guide the Christian in his relation to the world in general and in the matter of amusements in particular." Notice the word "guide." The principles enunciated by Synod are to serve the Christian as guides. They are set down not to justify an absolute prohibition; they are set down in order that the individual Christian may be enabled to regulate his own personal conduct in a way worthy of his profession. These principles are principles calculated to direct the *judgment* of the Christian; they are not principles calculated to arrest his judgment by the imposition of an inviolable ecclesiastical decree.

b. Not only is there no anticipation in Resolution I of the teaching attributed to Resolution II by the majority; there is no confirmation of that teaching in the Resolutions III to VII. If Synod had really meant to declare what the majority attributes to it, it could have done so with utmost clarity at several critical junctures. But never does it do so. It seems indeed to be at pains to avoid doing so. When consistories are advised how to deal with the worldly-minded they are not urged to deal "firmly" with those who, among other things, violate a Church rule on amusements; they are urged to deal "firmly" with "all cases of misdemeanor and offensive conduct in the matter of amusement," which is quite different. When consistories are instructed concerning whom to admit to Public Profession, they are not told to bar those who are not minded, among other things, to abandon cards; they are told to bar those who are not minded to lead the life of Christian separation and consecration, which is quite a different thing. Nowhere in these Resolutions are the three amusements men-

## "WORLDLY AMUSEMENTS" — Continued

tioned again by name. Everywhere the emphasis is upon the inner and the spiritual as opposed to the external and the legal.

The keynote is struck by Resolution III, in which Synod recognizes that worldliness is not a thing but a spirit, and that, as the minority puts it, "the only way to overcome it is by attacking it with spiritual weapons upon the only ground it ever occupies, the human heart" (p. 64). Synod calls in Resolution III for prayer, for works of love, and for study of the Scriptures. It does this because it knows that these religious exercises are calculated to provide the Christian with those spiritual resources without which he will be engulfed by the rising tide of worldliness. And it does this, too, because it knows that the Christian when he confronts the three amusements is recurrently thrown back upon these resources for appraisal and decision. That is why Synod is concerned that these resources be very strong and ample.

c. One more point on Resolution II. That it does not say what the majority affirms is evident from the only commentary given by a Synod on the Resolutions of 1928. In 1932, Synod, in reply to an overture from Classis Muskegon relative to card playing, made the majority position quite untenable when it declared: "it is the policy of Reformed Church government not to itemize and catalogue a list of particular sins" (Acts 1932, p. 38).

### Other Majority Arguments

WE said earlier that there were five arguments presented by the majority in support of its position. The first, based on the Resolutions themselves and more particularly on Resolution II, has now been dealt with. It remains to consider the other four within the briefest possible compass.

a. The first of these is based upon the use of the adjective "worldly" in conjunction with the noun "amusement." Synod, says the majority, has called the three amusements "worldly." Now what is worldly is sinful. Therefore . . .

This argument, implicit or explicit, recurs frequently in the majority report. One of the more explicit instances occurs on p. 31 of the Agenda. Here it is said: "No wonder Synod called

theater-attendance a *worldly* amusement!"

Now the fact is that the term "worldly amusement(s)" appears in the text of Synod's decisions four times. It occurs three times in a merely formal sense, as part of the title of a committee—the Committee on Worldly Amusements. The fourth time it occurs, it occurs in Resolution VII, where Synod instructs consistories to inquire of candidates for public profession "as to their stand and conduct in the matter of worldly amusements." Nowhere in all the Resolutions does Synod call any one of the amusements "worldly."

It is true, however, that the term is in general use among us, and that it is commonly employed in reference to the three amusements. Moreover, the Synod of 1926 definitely called the familiar trio "worldly amusements." But can the majority find in this fact justification for its position? Are we entitled to conclude from this fact alone that participation in these amusements is always and *per se* sinful? Obviously not. If the term itself were definitive the Synod of 1949 would never have appointed a committee to clarify the stand of the Church on worldly amusements. The stand would have been apparent to all by definition. We don't need a committee to tell us that worldly amusements are worldly.

b. Another argument is based upon the opinions and reasonings of the Study Report that accompanied the Recommendations adopted by the Synod of 1928. The majority does two things here: (1) it regards the Report as having synodical approval—"the Report to which Synod referred our people with implicit approval" (p. 31), and (2) it uses the Report when expedient to support its own position—"the Report of the Committee on Worldly Amusements . . . took a very definite stand against all theater-attendance, dancing, and card playing" (p. 40).

On this, two things. (1) The Report is, of course, not part of the decisions of 1928 and is thus not determinative. The majority itself proceeds on this assumption when convenient, as witness, to take but a single instance, its discussion of the question of cards. The majority says that the Committee of 1928 "condemned all card playing . . . on the ground that they as games of chance are a misuse of divine providence" (p. 36). The majority also

says: "the Synod of 1928 did not condemn card playing and other games of chance. . . on the ground that such games are a misuse of divine providence" (p. 53-4). Did Synod approve the Report or did it not? (2) As for using the Report as evidence for its opinion, the majority may profitably compare its contention that all theater-attendance is necessarily sinful with the much different position taken by the Report when it says: "But what shall we say about the so-called *good plays*? . . . We believe that the safest course to pursue is the way of total abstinence" (p. 33 of Booklet on Worldly Amusements).

c. There is still another argument of the majority. It rests on the action of the Synod of 1926, and on that of several classes, particularly Classis Illinois. The argument goes like this: The Synod of 1928 most certainly condemned the three amusements as simply, pervasively, and unqualifiedly worldly, for "the Synod of 1926 went on record as declaring that theater-attendance, dancing, and card playing are *worldly amusements* . . . Is it not fantastic to assume that the Synod of 1928 hesitated to say this?" (p. 35). But did the Synod of 1926 really take the position that the majority now advocates? Yes, so goes the argument, for the Synod of 1926 adopted the overture of Classis Illinois and the overture of Classis Illinois "branded theater and movie attendance, dancing, and card playing as 'worldly amusements'" (p. 34). The argument concludes therefore that Synod of 1928 put an absolute ban on the three amusements because the Synod of 1926 adopted an overture of Classis Illinois.

The windings of this argument are interesting, but I shall not follow them here for the reason that the argument is ably discussed by the Reverend Mr. Hoeksema in another article in this issue of the Journal. There is only one point I should like to touch on.

It would occur to any one to ask why Classis Illinois requested, and why the Synod of 1926 appointed, a Committee to determine in the light of Scripture the "true nature and character" of the three amusements, if their moral status had, as the majority contends, already been determined. To this question the majority replies: Classis Illinois "wanted Synod to produce *proofs* from Scripture" (p. 35). And presumably Synod wanted its Committee to produce proofs from Scripture.

Consider the implications of this reply. The majority is saying that Classis and Synod knew the three amusements were wholly sinful, but did not know that which is the Measure of all sin. It is saying that Classis and Synod took a final and definitive stand against the three amusements, but prior to and apart from a study of the relevant Scripture passages. It is saying that Classis and Synod needed not to have its convictions formed by a study committee; it only needed proofs to lend support to its already formed convictions. Can this be right?

d. There is one more argument of the majority to be considered. This argument is based on Time. It seeks to establish the majority opinion by showing that 23 years ago no responsible person took anything other than the position the majority now occupies. We quote the argument in full. It is found on pp. 33-4 of the Agenda and appears again on p. 40.

There are also those who definitely take the position that the amusements mentioned by Synod are not always and necessarily sinful . . . That interpretation is an anachronism. It takes no account of the fact that this lenient, compromising view of the three amusements under discussion was not defended at that time by any responsible party or body in

our church. Indeed, one person defended that view at the very Synod which made the decisions under discussion, and he was deposed as professor on that account! The sole member of your committee who served on the Committee of 1928 declares that that view was not defended by anyone in the Committee of that date.

We shall not comment on the indelicacy of the reference to the personal tragedy of a former professor at our school; nor on the unkind misrepresentation of the minority position and attitude; nor on the question-begging character of the entire argument. We only express the opinion that the majority is mistaken if it supposes that in 1928 there were no leaders in the Church who took the position the minority now assumes. Such leaders were found not only in great numbers in the Church; they were present in force on the Committee which drafted the Report. And, of course, Synod itself took that position.

### In Conclusion

It has been the burden of this article to suggest that the majority arguments are not conclusive. If they are not, this leaves the minority interpretation the only one in the field.

The minority's contention is two-fold. On the negative side it denies that Synod has taken the position "that every instance of theater-attendance, dancing, or card playing is in itself, under all circumstances, necessarily sinful" (Agenda, p. 59). It is with this negative thesis that this article has been almost exclusively concerned.

It would be regrettable, however, if this should lead anyone to suppose that the Resolutions of 1928 do not have a clear and forceful message for every Christian. In the strictest conformity to the high demands of the Gospel the Synod of 1928 not only condemned worldliness in the clearest possible terms, but it was concerned, as the minority is at pains to point out, "to warn against the threat to true Christian piety contained in the familiar trio of amusements, and was determined to give no comfort whatsoever to those who may be seeking license to fraternize with the world in these or other amusements" (Agenda, p. 59).

It should be very clear, therefore, that, while Synod did not enact an absolute Law of Prohibition, neither did it bless indulgence in the three amusements. Synod, in this matter, steered straight between the Legalist and the Libertine. And this is precisely what one would expect of a Synod committed to the Reformed position.

# TAKE SIN SERIOUSLY

By GERRIT HOEKSEMA\*

THERE are two phases of the Majority Report On Worldly Amusements (cf. *Agenda*, 1951, pp. 24-54) that merit special attention.

First, one of the recommendations to Synod reads:

"That though Synod maintains its position with respect to the dangers connected with all games of chance, it takes cognizance of the fact that there are certain kinds of card-games, and other games in which chance is at least one of the factors which decide the outcome of the game, against which many of our people have no moral scruples. For that reason consistories are cautioned to take this fact into consideration and not to apply discipline except in cases where members of the church persist in the more reprehensible

types of such games, especially when they play for money or prizes."

We call special attention to the words "no moral scruples," and "for that reason."

The position of the majority report is therefore this, that because some of our people have no moral scruples against certain types of card-games, *for that reason* Synod should caution consistories not to apply discipline.

### "Scruples" — A New Canon?

WE do not fear for one moment that Synod will adopt this advice. But we do feel constrained to utter a warning. For this advice must not only not be adopted; it should be emphatically repudiated. Let it be clearly understood what it involves.

*First*, the position is maintained that Synod 1928 declared that card-playing is a sinful amusement. *All* card-playing, let it be remembered. Synod 1928, so we are told, made no distinction between more serious and less serious ways in which that sin can be committed. *Second*, there are certain types of card games, against which some of our people have no moral scruples. *Third*, for that reason, consistories are to be cautioned not to exercise discipline in such cases.

In a word, because some of our people have no moral scruples against committing a certain sin (and perhaps

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## TAKE SIN SERIOUSLY — Continued

repeatedly), *therefore* the church must not exercise discipline.

But this is basically wrong. The question whether discipline must be exercised should never be determined subjectively. It must always be determined objectively by those in authority in the Church, and on the basis of Scriptural principles.

If, in an evil hour, Synod should ever decide that, in a given case, consistories must not exercise discipline, *because* the people have no moral scruples against a certain sin, then you open wide the door to all kinds of evils. Not the Word of God, not the holy convictions of the God-appointed rulers of the Church, but the scruples, or lack of scruples of the people decide the issue. Then you no longer have any real authority in the Church of Christ.

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The question arises, how did the majority committee ever arrive at such a dangerous conception of disciplinary authority, or rather lack of all authority, in the Church of Christ?

Now up to a point, there is no mystery here at all. The members of the majority committee were confronted with the indisputable fact that their position, that *all games of chance* are always sinful, found no response whatsoever in the conscience of many, perhaps of most, of our people. Their recognition of this fact is, of course, commendable. Recognition of facts, even when they do not fit so well into the scheme of our theories, is the way to clear thinking and proper solution of problems in every sphere.

Only *on one condition*, however. We must always be ready to ask the painful question: do these facts prove that my theory was all wrong? In this case that meant a frank facing of the question whether their interpretation of the resolutions of Synod 1928 (all games of chance condemned as sinful) was correct! We must presume, of course, that they did honestly face that question. But the outcome was most regrettable.

Had they come to the conclusion that their theory, their interpretation of 1928, was wrong, we might today have a united report on amusements. But it is abundantly evident that the members of the majority committee were not

shaken in the conviction that Synod 1928 declared that all games of chance are sinful. That position must be maintained and defended at all costs!

But—and that question could not be avoided — what advice must then be given to Synod on the question how to deal with these people who have no moral scruples against certain sinful (?) amusements, such as dominoes and rook?

Now of course, on the basis of, and consistent with its fundamental position, there was only one possible advice to give. Synod must be urged to arouse our people to the realization of a great moral and spiritual danger. For many of our people had no moral scruples against certain types of sinful amusements.

Such advice to Synod would have been consistent. It would have presented a clear-cut issue. It would have cleared the air. However, for reasons of its own, the majority committee does not present any such advice to Synod. Instead, we have the strange, surprising, and exceedingly dangerous advice not to discipline such members, *because* they have no moral scruples against certain types of amusements which the committee considers sinful.

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All this is very sad. The Church at the same moment that it condemns certain activities as sinful, also assures the sinners (?) that they need have no fear of discipline. The sin is not that serious.

This is not a caricature. This is precisely the stand of the committee. We quote them literally. "But there are *more* serious and *less* serious ways in which these sins may be committed." And, "No consistory, for example, would censure members who play dominoes in their home."

Of course not. But it is fervently to be hoped that our people will not be pleased or confused by such compromising concessions. For the stigma of sinning in their Christian homes by playing dominoes is still upon them. And in Christian self-respect they resent it. And the assurance "but you will not be disciplined" will not assuage their resentment.

Come, let us take sin seriously. Let us even take the *word* sin seriously. Sin is a transgression of the holy laws of a Holy God.

Let us not dare to use that word, and surely not in solemn Synodical pronouncements, unless we are fully convinced that some one is indeed sinning against God.

And if we must use it, and we certainly must in the sphere of amusements, let us not rob that word of its sting, and make discipline a mockery by assuring the sinner beforehand that the Church will not exercise discipline.

### An Unfounded Judgment

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HERE is one other phase of the majority report that needs to be corrected. On page 40 of the Agenda we read:

"Moreover, it was not necessary for the Synod of 1928 to make such a statement (that theater attendance, dancing, and card-playing are *per se* sinful) since previous Synods and three of our Classes had already condemned these amusements as 'evils,' as 'worldly' amusements."

That is a very interesting sentence indeed. It contains the implied admission that Synod 1928 nowhere explicitly states that participation in any of the well-known trio of amusements is always *per se* evil.

A very significant admission indeed. For the Church and its members are not bound by the phraseology used by a particular Classis as it brings a matter to Synod, but only by the decisions of Synod itself. And, as is abundantly shown in the minority report, there is no specific statement in all the resolutions of 1928 to the effect that these three amusements, or any participation in them, are always a sin before God.

However, we are told that that lack of clear definite language is not significant. You see, the matter was already settled in the minds of our people. So why did Synod have to express itself explicitly on a point on which all were agreed?

But this line of defense is grossly inaccurate. The question that now agitates the church was *not* settled before 1928. No Classis had consciously and specifically considered the question from this particular viewpoint: are these things always *per se* evil.

Strong expressions of warning and condemnation were heard from various quarters. Alarm bells were sounded.

And it can easily be contended that some who sounded the alarm favored an absolute ban. That very possibly was what some Classes meant, or at any rate some in the Classes, when they spoke of "evils" and "worldly amusements."

But the matter still had to be studied. The problem had to be clarified. Thus Classis Illinois requested Synod to make "the necessary study and investigation of the above-named amusements in order to determine their true nature and character in the light of Scripture."

Surely that is plain language. The true nature and character of these amusements had to be determined. That cannot possibly mean, of course, that it still was to be determined whether there was much evil and danger to moral and spiritual life in these three spheres. On that all our people were agreed. But their true nature and character was still to be determined.

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Now if Classis Illinois had been convinced that the well-known trio were essentially evil under all circumstances, it never would and never could have come to Synod with such a request. Instead, it would have urged Synod to adopt that same position. But it did nothing of the kind. The committee was to study and investigate to determine the true nature and character of these amusements.

That language clearly indicates that Classis Illinois, at the very moment it warned of evils and dangers and worldliness in these three spheres, was not yet ready to take a position on the question of the essential nature and character of these amusements. It was not announcing a position on that question, and asking Synod to approve that position. It was asking Synod to take a position after necessary study and investigation.

All this is so self-evident that we would not have taken up space to explain it, were it not that the majority committee holds that what Classis really wanted was proofs from Scripture for a position already taken. But that is a wrong interpretation of the language of Classis. Classis did not ask for proofs. It asked for study and investigation.

And it particularly asked for advice on the question "whether habitual indulgence in these amusements becomes a disciplinary matter." Now if Classis

Illinois had been fully convinced that these three forms of amusements (including all games of chance) were always *per se* sinful, it would never have asked for this advice. For no Christian Reformed Classis needs or would ask whether habitual indulgence in sin calls for discipline. Surely on this point there has never been any doubt in Reformed circles.

But a problem arises when members engage in certain pleasures that cannot always be condemned *per se*. The question then arises, Can not habitual indulgence call for discipline? That was very evidently the field of thought back of this request. No doubt every one of our consistories would seriously consider the need of discipline in the case of a member who habitually spent his leisure hours in taverns, without thereby necessarily condemning every single act of eating and drinking in a place where liquor is sold.

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At any rate, it is plain from the overture of Classis Illinois that the atmosphere in 1926 was not: the position is clear, the problem is settled, and all that is needed is proof from Scripture for a position that no one questions, and therefore does not even have to be clearly stated by Synod, to become law in the church.

It is also worthy of note that in the Report of the Committee of 1928 there are indications that Committee refused to go as far as an absolute ban.

For instance, there is one point in the report at which the question is very pointedly raised and discussed. On page 33 of the 1928 Amusements Report, the committee puts the question: "But what shall we say about the so-called good plays?

And what is the answer of the 1928 committee?

First, "he who takes this stand (that it is morally defensible to see a few good plays—GH) is, in spite of the fact that he may take it conscientiously, on dangerous ground."

The italics are those of the committee. But we also want to italicize those words. Those who take this stand are on dangerous ground.

Now, according to the position of the present majority committee we should have read something very different. We should have read, "even then they are sinning."

But this is not said. In other words, when the 1928 committee faced the

crucial question: Is theater attendance always, even in the most favorable circumstances, sin? — it did not take the position the present majority committee now advocates. It said that those who, even conscientiously, attend a few good plays, are "on dangerous ground." But it did not say: "They are sinning."

True, the final sentence in that paragraph reads: "We believe that the safest course to pursue is the way of total abstinence." But that again is really a rejection of the position of the present majority committee.

For Christians do not and may not say to each other, when it is a question of doing something that is always evil *per se*, "We believe it is safest to abstain."

Oh no! We do not say, for instance: "It is safest for you not to join the lodge, or to become intoxicated, or to commit adultery." We use such language only when we dare not say: "You sin if you do that." We use such language when we recognize that we may not pass final judgment.

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One closing remark. Let there be no misunderstanding as to the position taken in this article.

We do not contend that Synod 1928 declared that a minimum of theater attendance, dancing and card-playing is perfectly legitimate.

We say that Synod neither declared that these three things are always *per se* sinful, nor did it say that in some circumstances they are not sinful. Synod simply did not declare itself one way or the other. The problem therefore is left to the local consistories. But not merely the problem when to apply discipline, but also the question when the stigma of "sinner" must be placed upon members of our Church.

Finally, we have not here discussed the question whether the stand of Synod 1928 was correct, or whether it should have been even more strict or perhaps more lenient. The only question here discussed is, What did Synod say?

Some hold that Synod placed the stigma of "sinner" upon every member who ever participates in one of these three forms of amusement, even if it were only the playing of a game of dominoes. We do not believe that Synod meant or said that.

# Synod 1928

on

## Amusements

The position of the Synod of 1928 on the matter of *Amusements* has been subject to a great deal of discussion in our circles. It is possible, however, that much of this discussion has been carried on without an exact knowledge of the Resolutions adopted by that Synod.

It may be considered of the highest importance to go to the original text of those decisions if one is to know what the *stand* of the Christian Reformed Church is in the matter of Amusements.

Furthermore, an acquaintance with those Resolutions is necessary to an evaluation of the Majority and Minority reports on *Amusements* that are being presented to the 1951 Synod. And that acquaintance will also help to an understanding and evaluation of the discussion on Amusements as it is carried on in this Journal and elsewhere.

The *Seven Resolutions on Amusements*, adopted by the Synod of 1928, are given in full text below:

I. Synod reminds our people of the doctrinal and ethical principles which should guide the Christian in his relation to the world in general and in the matter of amusements in particular, and urges all our professors, ministers, elders, and Bible-teachers to emphasize these principles in this age of prevailing worldliness.

Some of the most important of these principles follow:

1. *The honor of God* requires:

- a) That the Christian's amusements should at the very least not conflict with any commandment of God;
- b) That we and our children should be keenly aware also in our amusements, of our covenant relation to God as His peculiar people;
- c) That the Christian shall deem it a matter of loyalty to God not to further the interests of an institution which is manifestly an instrument of Satan for attack on the Kingdom of God.

2. From the consideration of the *welfare of man* we conclude:

- a) That there is a legitimate place in life for such amusements as are recreative for body and mind;
- b) That no physical recreation or mental diversion should be tolerated which is in any way or in any degree subversive of our spiritual and moral well-being;
- c) That, even when our amusements are not spiritually or morally harmful, they should not be allowed to occupy more than a secondary, subordinate, place in life.

3. *The principle of spiritual separation from the world*:

- a) Does not imply that Christians should form separate communities or should shun all association with ungodly men (1 Cor. 5:9 ff.);
- b) Forbids friendship in distinction from fellowship, with evil men (James 4:4);

- c) Requires that we shun all evil in the world;
- d) Demands a weaning away of the heart from the transient things of this present earthly sphere (Col. 3:1, 2).

4. *Christian liberty*:

- a) Consists in freedom from the power of sin; in freedom from the law: its curse, its demands as a condition for earning eternal life, its oppressive yoke; and in liberty of conscience with reference to human ordinances and things neither prescribed nor condemned either directly or indirectly, in the Word of God;
- b) Is limited in its exercise by the law of love (1 Cor. 8:9, 13), the law of self-preservation (Matt. 18:8, 9) and the law of self-denial, which often requires the renunciation of things in themselves lawful (Matt. 16:24).

II. While *several* practices are found in our circles which cannot pass the muster of these principles, and while *all* our amusements, not only theatre-attendance, dancing and card-playing, should be judged in the light of these principles, yet Synod feels constrained, in pursuance of the decision of the Synod of 1926 in the matter of amusements, to call particular attention to this familiar trio. It greatly deplores the increasing prevalence among us of these forms of amusements, urgently warns our members against them, and further refers our people to the material on the subject given in the report of the Committee on Worldly Amusements (Agenda, Part I, pp. 31-47).

III. Synod urges all our leaders and all our people to pray and labor for the awakening and deepening of spiritual life in general, and to be keenly aware of the absolute indispensability of keeping our religious life vital and powerful, through daily prayer, the earnest searching of the Scriptures, and through engaging in practical Christian works, which are the best antidote against worldliness.

IV. Synod exhorts all our leaders to warn unceasingly against the prevailing spirit and forms of worldliness in order that our Reformed principles in these matters may be re-emphasized; insists that these warnings shall be given not only in the preaching, but also in our Catechism and Sunday School classes, in family-visitation, and in personal contact whenever occasion presents itself; and urges that these warnings shall be given also in our school-rooms.

V. Synod reminds consistories that in nominations for or appointment to positions of responsibility in our churches, careful attention should be paid to conduct in the matter of amusements; and suggests that also other bodies, such as Boards of Christian Schools, City Missions, etc., heed this same matter in their appointments.

VI. Synod urges consistories to deal in the spirit of love, yet also, in view of the strong tide of worldliness which is threatening our churches, very firmly with all cases of misconduct and offensive conduct in the matter of amusements; and, where repeated admonitions by the consistory are left unheeded, to apply discipline as a last resort.

VII. Synod instructs consistories to inquire of those who ask to be examined previous to making public profession of their faith and partaking of the Lord's Supper as to their stand and conduct in the matter of worldly amusements, and, if it appears that they are not minded to lead the life of Christian separation and consecration, not to permit their public profession.

# Towards a Calvinistic University

By HENRY ZYLSTRA

**T**HE Reverend E. Van Halsema, editor of our Dutch denominational weekly, *De Wachter*, has put us all under obligation to him for rousing our slumbering ideal of a Calvinistic university.

He did so in seven editorial articles on "The University Movement Among Us" which he contributed to *De Wachter* in issues extending from December 5, 1950 to January 30, 1951. It is a pleasure to give the substance of his argument the further dimension of English restatement here.

It is an encouraging thing in this year of 1951, jubilee year for Calvin College and Seminary, and coincident almost with the sixtieth anniversary of the Free University of Amsterdam, to have so poised and conviction-laden an appeal sounded among us. This is a year to take heart from tradition, from history. It is a year to determine direction, to draw a line from the past to the present, and to sight along this line into the future.

It is appropriate, consequently, that *De Wachter* should be in the van of this program for Reformed advance. Those whom *De Wachter* peculiarly serves, those close to the Dutch tradition of the Reformed way, those are the ones who know that the Reformed idea has consequences, and that among these consequences in education is the establishment sometime of a Reformed University.

There is no limit to what we must do for the King except the limit of means. When we come to reflect first that nothing matters but the Kingdom, and next that everything matters because of it, we are in a fine state of mind to hear Van Halsema out, and to get on with our university ideal.

## The Need

**H**E touches on the need for such a university, of course, but he supposes that for the most part this is not in dispute among us. "That there is need for a university founded on a Reformed basis surely requires no contention," he writes.

The need arises both from what we are against, and from what we are for. What we are against is the prevailing

mind of our time, its autonomous morality, its humanism, its repudiation of the authority of the Scriptures. That dominant spirit in the mind of the age, legacy as it is of Renaissance humanism, Enlightenment rationalism, and romantic liberalism, a spirit which goaded Abraham Kuyper and his people into the heroism of founding the Free University at Amsterdam — that spirit still prevails.

Because we are *against* that spirit, we are, like our Reformed predecessors, committed to a full-circle opposition to it which requires university scope, intensity, and depth.

But we are *for* something too. The bud of university development lies folded in the life that is ours in Christ. "Listen," says Van Halsema, "listen to the . . . stirring . . . elevated prayer which Kuyper prayed on the occasion of the establishment of the Free University:

'Our Father Who art in heaven: Thou art the Fountain of all truth, the Well-Head of all real knowledge, the Source of all wisdom. Apart from Thee Thy creatures encounter darkness, numbness, and enslavement of the soul. But in Thy presence, near unto Thee, we bathe in the fulness of Thy life, revel in Thy luminousness; there Thy power energises us, and unfolds itself in the blessed transport of the freedom of faith.'

Van Halsema knows, of course, that although in principle the need for a Calvinistic university is beyond contention, that need requires pointing out, clarification, and discussion. He is convinced that the career of such a proposed university can be promising only if it has a back-log of conviction in the *communis opinio* of the people.

"We must," he says, "begin talking our ideals again. At our meetings and gatherings things of local concern too often govern us. Why not . . . discuss matters such as this which are intimately bound up with our task and calling? Our ministers, professors, educators, and others should exert themselves to inspire our people with the ideal, and to chart the way towards achieving it . . . God has cared to bless the work of our forebears. Now that a new generation has come, we believe it is necessary once more to hold up before our

people what their challenge and responsibility is. Except we do this, we shall end up in the doldrums."

That is the core of Van Halsema's argument: "that we reflect seriously upon this in order to arrive as soon as possible at a clearly delineated idea of our intent, and a carefully organized plan for implementing it."

He is not, be it said, impatient to send out collectors, take on some property, get up a prospectus, and announce the opening of school. Indeed much of his argument goes to warning against ill-considered, precipitate action. He has a realistic sense of what in scholars, in plant, in equipment, and of what therefore in reliable resources are required for such a big thing as a university.

He marvels at the courage and accomplishment of those who support the Free University at Amsterdam, but he sees also that after as many as sixty years that achievement is limited, and is operative in only a few areas of study.

He takes pains to point out the lessons to be learned from the partial failure of the Philadelphia experiment: the inadequate preliminary conference and discussion, the reluctant cooperation, the lack of depth in support, the imposition, as it seemed, from above of a *fait accompli*. He is realistic about this.

But he counsels that we develop and maintain a sense of direction and a plan of action.

## Church or Society?

**T**HE Reverend Van Halsema thinks that what hurts us more than anything else in furthering our university ideal is an unwillingness to make up our minds about whether we want "church" or "society" control in our higher education.

That problem is, of course, a problem of long standing with us. Van Halsema points to the history of opinion about it from way back, refers to the recent revival of expressive interest in it, reviews some major Synodical statements concerning it. He knows of the strong and vigorously expressed conviction of the Reverend Idzerd Van

## TOWARD A CALVINISTIC UNIVERSITY—Continued

Dellen in favor of society and against ecclesiastical supervision of our higher education.

The difference of opinion about this important practical issue is sometimes called a dispute between idealism, on the one hand, and realism, on the other; or yet again a difference between "principle" and "practice."

The Reverend John Ehlers (*De Wachter*, February 27 to March 13, 1951), reverting to the consideration of Van Halsema's pieces, has another way of referring to this mooted point among us. He calls it the difference between those who say, "Here's how it ought to be done" (society control), and those who say, "Here's how it may be done" (ecclesiastical control).

Van Halsema's own present convictions lean in the direction of church control. He presses two important considerations in its favor: the fact that seventy-five years of history now sanction our present conduct of Calvin College (. . . "we should not ignore the historically evolved"); and the practicability of the church control.

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All the same, Van Halsema honors those on the opposite side of the question. He invites the further statement of their case. He reminds them that the burden of showing the practicability of society-control of Calvin College, and also of an eventual university, rests with them; and he tells them not to wait too long to present their argument.

But more important for Van Halsema than his own position on the issue is his sense of the need for bringing it to a head. He thinks we are paying the high price of delay in our university movement because of our irresoluteness on this issue. But let him tell it:

"Maybe there are those who will say that nothing ought to be done. They would rather let the whole matter rest. But it seems to us that this is not desirable. Nothing is helped along by being suspended in thin air. It is much better to come to a decision, to make a deliberate choice. The sooner we can arrive at conviction about this, the better . . . The Synod of 1944 enjoined discussion of the issue upon us. Very little discussion has taken place.

"We are not entirely at ease about this silence. When one cocks his ear for the attitude of our people, he

gathers there is some feeling among us for the idea that Calvin be separated from the church. True, the annual quotas for Calvin College are dutifully paid, but not always, everywhere with manifest love. Now and again it is done with the thought: We can't do anything about it anyhow; the assessments are imposed on us from the top, and we have to pay for them whether we want to or not. That is, it is true, a regrettable picture of the state of affairs here and there, but we are doing our best not to close our eyes to the facts in the case. And it may be that such conditions are the result of our dallying through the years with the determination of educational policy. Are we to lie low and look in another direction? Or shall we address ourselves resolutely to the whole problem ("de heele zaak eens flink aanpakken") and bring it to a defined conclusion?"

### Six Possible Plans

**V**AN Halsema is not a man to be talking vaguely and in general terms about how to get on with our university movement. He comes with three hypothetically projected plans for implementing the ideal. These he would have tested in the crucible of discussion, tried in the fire of debate, hammered out on the anvil of committee and conference. Three plans? Really he comes with five, for his third has itself three possibilities. And to these the Reverend John Ehlers, coming after Van Halsema in his "Gleanings from the Press," adds a sixth for consideration.

These are the six tentatively projected plans:

*The World Plan*, i.e., an international university commanding the resources of a world-wide Reformed community.

*The United States Plan*, i.e., a national university commanding the resources of the Christian Reformed, Reformed, and orthodox Presbyterian community.

*The Calvin Plan: Church Controlled*, i.e., a denominational university representing the development of Calvin College and Seminary into a post-graduate institution.

*The Calvin Plan: Society Controlled*, i.e., an extra-ecclesiastical institution, comprising both Calvin College and a

university, both of them conducted and superintended by a society, not by the church.

*The Calvin Plan: Church and Society Controlled*, i.e., the college continuing as a church-controlled institution, the university to be conducted independently by a society.

*The Calvin-Hybrid* (Ehlers) Plan, i.e., a Calvin-centered national university whose controlling authorities represent a composite of official ecclesiastical and spontaneous society control.

This variety of plans points up the thrust of Van Halsema's message, namely, that we must choose a destination and strike a course in this matter rather than drift at sea.

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The *World Plan* beckons to him. It has the tremendous appeal of wide resources. Van Halsema points out that it is ideological difference, not geographical distance, that separates us internationally these days, and he holds that such ideological difference does not exist for the Reformed "one world." International exchange of students, too, is quite the thing in our time. But the feature that appeals most about this key-feature: total international resources.

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A wide range of contributive strength is the feature also of the *United States Plan*. Van Halsema calls this the Philadelphia Plan in reference to the mainly unsuccessful attempt some years ago to found a Calvinistic university there.

This partial failure — partial because unsuccess in realizing an ideal is never total — is against such a plan though not conclusively. What the failure teaches among other things is that the total membership in orthodox Reformed churches cannot be counted on to rally to the support of a university.

The Philadelphia experiment proceeded, Van Halsema thinks, without adequate preliminary groundwork in the way of conference between groups in the way also of educating the people inside the individual group. A society was formed, a campus purchased, and an announcement of opening made, but there was no depth of widely operative popular conviction.

That is an important condition of success for a *United States Plan*: because the supporting constituency is not quite homogeneous, there must be long

preliminary discussion, conference, and reciprocal education.

In favor of all the *Calvin* plans, most particularly of the *church-controlled plan*, is this formidable consideration: "a homogeneous, self-conscious group would be behind it." By a self-conscious group Van Halsema means a body of people already united in self-achieved conviction.

That is the simon-pure Calvinistic core of Van Halsema's moving argument: that a Christian university is no stronger than the quality and depth of *the popular conviction* supporting it.

Closest to his heart therefore is the Calvin Plan for a university, conducted, as the college now is, under church control. He is as reluctant to sacrifice a range of resources as anyone. He knows a university requires staggering contributions, and he knows that "we are small." But he points out that we are growing, and he thinks that our people have shown themselves willing to sacrifice for whatever can be shown to be manifest duty.

## Matter for Discussion

**H**OWEVER, Van Halsema is open to argument. He suggests that if those who wish society control can show that the university will be really Reformed, and that the society governing it will have "the vitality and the vision" to lead and support it, he can be moved from his present position.

The conclusion he urges is this: "In 1944 the Church said that it did not 'at the present time' want to identify itself with a definite plan for a university . . . But the time will come, must come, when more is to be said. The declaration of '44 is too negative, too vague.

"Unless the Church can be convinced by powerful arguments that a different course of action must be taken, let it declare after a while that it has in mind the eventual development of Calvin College into a university. Then we know what we want, where we are going, what our program is, even though it takes years before we can begin actualizing the university expansion."

The Reverend John Ehlers, stirred as the compiler of this survey is, by Van Halsema's sense of the practicality of ideals, wishes also to begin the action.

He suggests the early appointment of a four-year study committee representing *both* the official ecclesiastical and the "society" elements of the Reformed community. He sees a possible solution to the church-or-society issue in a church-and-society plan of implementation. He proposes this "in the hope that when we commemorate the centennial of our Calvin Seminary, we shall, the Lord willing, also have the privilege of dedicating Calvin University to our Creator and Redeemer."

Here, then, is matter for inquiry, discussion, *resolution*. This of Van Halsema is indeed a poised and conviction-laden sense of *religion engagée*.

When we come to reflect first that nothing matters but the Kingdom, and next that everything matters because of it, "our university movement" will not, as Van Halsema hints, remain "buried in the *Acta*." It will become as practical as working out our salvation.

# Crowding Hopkins Off the Log

By W. HARRY JELLEMA

I SUPPOSE that the average American today would, after a little reflection, define textbook as any book that is used for close study in some schoolroom. The book may be an arithmetic; it may be a history; it may be a volume on dogmatics. It may be interesting and filled with pictures, or it may be unattractive and forbidding. It may be a book which is never read except by teachers and pupils, or it may be one that is found in every public library. But whatever the book, if it happens to have been selected for classroom use, and selected not for casual reading but for serious study, we call it a textbook.

### What Is a Textbook?

AND for many commonplace practical purposes, this definition is close enough. But it is a definition of the word, rather than of the thing. It tells us how we come to call a book a textbook rather than what a textbook really is. It will serve as long as I im-

tend only conventionally to describe the contents of a schoolboy's satchel or conveniently to arrange books on a shelf.

But if, instead, I purpose seriously to write a textbook or to discuss the merits of alternative textbooks, the definition is quite inadequate. Then I shall need to know what a textbook really is. Then to define textbook by the fact that it is used in a classroom is almost placing cart before horse; for then the truth of the matter is not so much that it is a textbook because it is used in a classroom as that it is used in a classroom because it is a textbook.

What a textbook really is I cannot know except as I know the proper function of a textbook in the educational process.

Indeed, judged by any more nearly adequate definition in terms of proper function, there are many books which are used for close study in classrooms, and which therefore are descriptively known as textbooks, which, I think, do not really deserve the name. They

are not real textbooks. And to write more of the same kind would, I think, be a mistake.

The "textbooks" used in contemporary schoolrooms fall broadly into three classes. Employing admittedly emotive language, I shall call them the pedagogical masters, the profitable servants, and the tyrannical usurpers.

### The Pedagogical Masters

**F**IRST, there are the pedagogical masters. I am here thinking not of the infallible Bible, which merits consideration all by itself, but of the books which though not infallible nor perfect are nonetheless classic productions. They, so far as human writings can, catch up into themselves the light of generations of observation and thought and wisdom and aspiration. They are not infallible guides for my faith and practice; nor do they furnish me with my only comfort in life as well as in death; nor do I need them in order to

## CROWDING HOPKINS OFF THE LOG — Continued

be a Christian. But I cannot be an educated Christian except, on my level of schooling, I do know them and have learned from them. They are books that have shaped the framework of the world in which I must live and act and witness and fight. They are books that educate. They are books that teach the teachers as well as the pupils.

Most of these were not written to be used in classroom teaching. Aeschylus did not write his plays, nor Cicero his orations, intending that schoolboys should use them as texts. Nor did Hawthorne have the high school in mind when he wrote *The Scarlet Letter*, nor Irving when he wrote *The Sketch Book*. Nor was Scott thinking of the eighth grade when he wrote *Ivanhoe*, nor Longfellow when he composed *Hiawatha*. Nor are such textbooks limited to what we usually call literature. Augustine, Pericles, Darwin, Jefferson, Rousseau, Mill, and dozens of others, wrote such books. Not all will be textbooks for the grammar school; nor will they there be wholly absent.

If he is to learn how to read these, the classroom pupil needs a teacher. To make possible the pupil's understanding and appreciation of such books or extracts from them, to lead the pupil so that he will be rightly matured by them, in the process to develop the pupil's judgment and his capacity for critical evaluation of them, this requires a teacher; a teacher who himself owes his mastery over the books to his having learned from them.

Such books are pedagogical masters. And they deserve to be textbooks.

### The Profitable Servants

**T**HEN there is a second class. These are the books which are profitable servants. Of such may be a book of maps, a book of problems and exercises or experiments, a list of definitions or of irregular verbs, a book of declensions and conjugations, an outline of historical facts and movements or of an argument, an outline of the topics and subtopics of the semester's course, and the like. A rule of thumb for the composing of a textbook of this class is *to put into it only what a good teacher would otherwise have to dictate*.

These are handbooks. They are servants of the teacher and pupil. By themselves they cannot teach. When the material permits, they are constructed

with obvious system, but even then require the teacher to make them come alive and speak.

Such handbooks will differ from one subject to another, from one level of instruction to another, from one age to another, from a Christian school to a non-Christian, and even from one teacher to another.

Thus a handbook in European History as of today will, as mere outline, not only include more material of a non-political kind than two centuries ago, but the difference will be evident in the book's organization and skeleton outline. Or, again, a handbook for a semester of junior high English may consist largely of such things as an outline of the course, biographical and historical data, chronological tables of concurrent events, suggestive questions, topics for papers, models of analysis, or whatever routine and auxiliary material the teacher needs that he would otherwise have to dictate. On the other hand, a handbook in arithmetic may be little more than a logical outline of the subject matter of the course, definitions, essential formulae, graded exercises, and the like.

Generally such handbooks, if they are to be profitable servants, will be brief. They will not assume that the teacher is himself likely to be ignorant; nor that he can himself not introduce the pupil intelligently, logically, pedagogically, to a new subtopic except it be decided for him when he has spent enough time on the old and how he is to attack the new; how he is, for example, to work up to the subject of factoring the products of squared binomials, or how he is to present simple division in the primary grades, or how he shall teach adverbs, or hydraulic pressure.

I suppose many a teacher will wish he could mimeograph his own handbooks, even on the primary level. He has his own ideas as to what is the best way—at least the best way for him—to organize the outline of the semester's course, and the emphases, and the implications of his faith. And I suppose, too, that given a capable school principal and the necessary facilities, there is every reason to encourage the teacher's doing it. But even though the handbook in a given course be written by another, it can be a profitable servant. Provided always that it remains no more than a book which contains

only what the teacher would otherwise have to dictate.

Such books which never presume to function in any capacity but that of lowly and silent servants of teacher and pupil also deserve the name textbooks. Unlike the master classics, they require no genius for the writing; they require only a good teacher. And though they are little more than skeletons, to write them is no mistake.

### The Usurpers

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HERE is also a third class. And to this class belongs a large proportion of the books that today happen to be used for serious study in the classroom. They are not master books, nor profitable servants, but usurpers and tyrants. And as far as I am able to discern, contemporary "textbooks" tend more and more to gravitate toward this class, even on the grammar school level, and even in fields like mathematics and science.

These are books that shackle the teacher. Nor am I thinking only of the fact that at one or another or at several points they may be in conflict with the teacher's deepest convictions. Indeed, that at these points they can shackle him is because from the very start they have usurped his function. They organize the course for him. They break it up into units and lessons. They determine the emphases. They set the philosophic framework. They do the explaining. They do the discussing. They do the teaching. They treat the teacher as one who has still to be taught what he is appointed to teach. They assume the role of pedagogical masters, but play it like tyrants. They reduce the teacher to literary serfdom; his is the business of checking the pupil's skill at catching on to the trick of working exercises and problems.

What such "textbooks" do to the pupil is no better. Having once learned his letters, he never learns to read.

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Of real textbooks, there are two kinds, those which are pedagogical masters and those which are profitable servants. The former kind you and I cannot write; the second kind we should.

But of the third kind, the kind that usurp the place of the teacher, we already have too many. We should certainly not wish to add to their number. Or do we wish to crowd Hopkins off the log?